

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0689
AL ORTIZ/COLOMBIA

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COLOMBIAN DRUGS

ANNCR:

COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES ARE INTENSIFYING THEIR EFFORTS TO CONTROL THE ILLEGAL DRUG TRAFFIC. VOA'S AL ORTIZ HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

DRUG TRAFFICKING IS BIG BUSINESS IN COLOMBIA. POLICE AUTHORITIES ESTIMATE THAT ABOUT FIFTEEN HUNDRED KILOGRAMS OF COCAINE LEAVE THE COUNTRY EVERY MONTH -- EACH KILO WORTH ABOUT TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS AT THE STREET PRICE. MOST OF THE COCAINE THAT LEAVES COLOMBIA REACHES THE UNITED STATES, BUT LARGE AMOUNTS ARE ALSO SHIPPED TO WESTERN EUROPE. MORE THAN HALF OF ALL THE COCAINE BOUGHT AND SOLD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD IS PROCESSED IN COLOMBIA.

THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT LAUNCHED ITS DRUG CONTROL PROGRAM IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-THREE BY REORGANIZING THE POLICE AGENCIES, ROUTING OUT CORRUPT POLICE OFFICERS AND DECREERING SPECIFIC PENALTIES FOR DRUG ABUSE FOR THE FIRST TIME. SINCE THEN THE NUMBER OF ARRESTS ON DRUG CHARGES HAS INCREASED STEADILY, BUT SO HAS THE TRAFFICKING.

THE GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT ALFONZO LOPEZ MICHELSEN HAS ISSUED NEW DECREES THAT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE DRUG USER AND THE TRAFFICKER. FOR EXAMPLE, A PERSON FOUND IN POSSESSION OF MORE THAN TWO-POINT EIGHT GRAMS OF MARIJUANA IS CONSIDERED A TRAFFICKER. THE DRUG USERS STILL FACE PRISON SENTENCES OF SEVERAL YEARS. HOWEVER, FOR THEM, THE EMPHASIS IS SHIFTING FROM PENALTIES TO REHABILITATION. BUT THE WAR ON TRAFFICKERS HAS BEEN STEPPED UP.

THE MAIN POLICE AGENCY CONCERNED WITH DRUG TRAFFICKING, CALLED THE F-TWO, IS INCREASING ITS FORCE OF FULL-TIME NARCOTICS AGENTS FROM ABOUT ONE HUNDRED TO MORE THAN THREE HUNDRED. THE UNITED STATES DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION IS GIVING COLOMBIA MORE THAN ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN AID THIS YEAR -- DOUBLE LAST YEAR'S AMOUNT. MOST OF THE MONEY PAYS FOR COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT.

THE INVESTMENT IS PAYING OFF. LAST YEAR, COLOMBIAN POLICE SEIZED NEARLY SEVEN HUNDRED KILOS OF COCAINE, TWELVE COCAINE PROCESSING LABORATORIES AND MORE THAN FIFTEEN HUNDRED TONS OF MARIJUANA THAT WAS UNDER CULTIVATION. BUT THAT'S ONLY A FRACTION OF THE ESTIMATED TRAFFIC. POLICE ARRESTED MORE THAN ONE THOUSAND SUSPECTED TRAFFICKERS, MOSTLY COLOMBIANS, BUT THERE WERE SOME EUROPEAN AND U.S. CITIZENS. NATIONAL POLICE CHIEF HENRY GARCIA BOHORQUEZ SAYS HIS MEN HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CAPTURE ONLY TWO OF THE BIG DRUG RING LEADERS. THEY'RE CALLED THE GODFATHERS. MAJOR BOHORQUEZ SAYS A BIG PROBLEM IS THAT THERE'S SO MUCH MONEY TO BE MADE IN COCAINE TRAFFICKING AND SOCIETY HAS FEW LEGITIMATE JOBS THAT PAY AS WELL.

IN THE PAST, SOME OF THE BIG MONEY IN DRUG TRAFFICKING WAS USED TO BRIBE POLICE AGENTS. BUT THAT'S APPARENTLY CHANGED NOW WITH THE NEW BREED OF HIGHLY TRAINED NARCOTICS AGENTS -- AMONG THEM -- CAPTAIN RICARDO MARTINEZ. HE'S THIRTY YEARS OLD, TALL, THIN, WITH A FRIENDLY SMILE. HE HAS A BULLET WOUND IN HIS LEG FROM HIS LAST SCRAPE WITH TRAFFICKERS AT BOGOTA'S AIRPORT. HE SAYS HE DOES HIS JOB OUT OF A PATRIOTIC DUTY, TO KEEP COLOMBIA FROM BEING OVERRUN BY TRAFFICKERS AND TO PROTECT HIS FIVE-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER

FROM THE THREAT OF DRUGS. CAPTAIN MARTINEZ SAYS THE NEW TOUGH DRUG PENALTIES WILL HELP. AND WITH THE BUILDUP OF THE NARCOTICS FORCE, HE SAYS, POLICE CAN INTENSIFY THEIR EFFORTS IN THE RURAL AREAS WHERE MARIJUANA IS GROWN AND COCAINE IS PROCESSED. EVEN AS HE SAYS THIS, HIS TELEPHONE RINGS. A NARCOTICS AGENT REPORTS THE SEIZURE OF SEVERAL HUNDRED TONS OF PROCESSED MARIJUANA ON THE NORTHERN COAST. CAPTAIN MARTINEZ SMILES AND SAYS WE STILL HAVE SUCH A LONG WAY TO GO.

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